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## ENGLISH AGRICULTURE SINCE 1914

### I. THE WAR PERIOD

At the outbreak of the war English agriculture was in a fairly prosperous condition. The great depression, which for more than thirty years had made farming little better than a wild attempt to fly from disaster, was succeeded by an unmistakable recovery in the first decade of the new century. At enormous cost to landlords and farmers the industry had adjusted itself to the condition of the world's market. By 1910 the arable area in England and Wales, which in the period 1871-75 averaged more than  $14\frac{3}{4}$  million acres, had been reduced to less than  $11\frac{1}{2}$  million acres; and the census of 1911 as compared with that of 1871 shows a decline of over 200,000 in the number of persons who were returned as engaged in agriculture.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime rents had been reduced; and technique had improved, more especially in those branches of agriculture which seemed least endangered by foreign competition—that is to say, stock breeding and dairying. These adjustments help to explain the recovery which took place when prices began to move upward under the

<sup>1</sup> The census of 1901 gives the minimum. Between 1901 and 1911 there was an increase of over 18,000 in the number of persons returned.

influence of increased gold production. With the industry adapted to a régime of low prices it was not necessary that prices should reach anything approaching their old level to give farmers substantial encouragement; and in fact, though the rise in the prices of agricultural products was in most cases somewhat below the rise of prices in general as shown by Sauerbeck's index numbers, the prospects of farming became on the whole fairly good. The outlook as revealed in Sir Daniel Hall's *Pilgrimage of British Farming*, which was the result of tours undertaken by the author (then Mr. A. D. Hall) in 1910, 1911, and 1912, affords a striking contrast to the gloomy picture of the condition of affairs only ten years before painted by Sir H. Rider Haggard in his *Rural England*.<sup>1</sup> There was a marked decline in the number of farming bankruptcies, the annual average number being 453 from 1892 to 1898, 315 from 1899 to 1905, and 299 from 1906 to 1912.<sup>2</sup> In 1912, Mr. Edward Strutt—a very great authority on the subject—considered it “probable that a large proportion of the second-class grasslands of the south and east of England, and perhaps some of the east Midlands, could be reconverted into arable with considerable profit to those engaged in their cultivation.”<sup>3</sup>

But though the outlook for English agriculture in 1914 was favorable, it cannot be said that the opportunities which were opening out were fully used. The landlords, impoverished by the depression and still bound by family traditions to maintain their estates intact even when burdened under family settlements with the payment of large sums to collateral relations, lacked the capital requisite for the proper development of their land. They also lacked the knowledge which had enabled their grandfathers to be the pioneers of agricultural improvement. And they were still imbued with a spirit of feudal paternalism, which made them

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hall, *Pilgrimage of British Farming*, pp. 431, 437–38.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Lennard, *Economic Notes on English Agricultural Wages* (1914), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> See E. G. Strutt, *Presidential Address to the Surveyors' Institution* (November 11, 1912), p. 6. On the general question see the *Interim Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture of 1919*, Cmd. 473 (“Majority Report,” § 5; “Minority Report,” § 3); also R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle), *English Farming Past and Present* (1912), p. 382.

too lenient to inefficient tenants, so that the years of depression had done less to bring about a "survival of the fittest" among tenant-farmers than might have been expected.<sup>1</sup> The farmers, again, though their position and prospects were markedly improved, in many cases failed to take advantage of the times. Many were still burdened with debts incurred during the depression. A period of hardship had impaired the spirit of enterprise and induced a spirit of timidity. As a class they suffered from defective education. Though the best English farming was as good as any in the world and English pedigree stock was almost unrivaled, the average of English farming fell short of the standard which might not unreasonably have been expected and was to a marked degree inferior to that which obtained in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> It is significant that the contraction of the arable area continued after the period of recovery began. In 1900 there were 12,217,208 acres of arable in England and Wales: in 1905 the figure had sunk to 11,656,079, in 1910 to 11,320,444, and in 1914 to 10,998,254. Between 1900 and 1914 the year 1912 was the only one which witnessed any movement in the contrary direction.

Along with the factors mentioned above as inimical to the full realization of the improved opportunities, something must also be allowed for the alarm occasioned by the radical program of Mr. Lloyd George in the years immediately preceding the war. As the landowners were terrified by the budget of 1909, so the farmers were terrified by the proposed minimum wage for farm laborers which was the most important element in the land program of 1913.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult of course to gauge the influence exercised by such fears, because they were fostered and paraded

<sup>1</sup> See Strutt, *op. cit.*, p. 30. As regards the dearth of agricultural knowledge among modern landlords a shrewd observer once suggested to me that the development of athletics in the public schools was a contributing factor: games attracted the squire's sons, so that they took less part in the sports of country life. On the failings and difficulties of landlords see Prothero, *op. cit.*, pp. 400-401; Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 437; J. Orr, *Agriculture in Oxfordshire* (1916), pp. 115, 118-19; *Report of the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee of the Reconstruction Committee* (Lord Selborne's Committee), Cd. 9079 (1918), Part I, § 18.

<sup>2</sup> See Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-53, 440-42; cf. Christopher Turnor, *The Land and Its Problems* (1921), pp. 51, 54-56.

<sup>3</sup> See Prothero, *op. cit.*, chap. xix, *passim*; J. A. R. Marriott, *The English Land System* (1914), p. 133.

for political purposes. But they deserve mention; and the subject of the minimum wage brings one naturally to the consideration of another feature of English rural economy on the eve of the war—the condition of the agricultural laborer.

The class which forms the great bulk of the agricultural community had suffered rather than gained by the recent rise in prices, for wages had not been advanced in proportion to the increase in the cost of living.<sup>1</sup> The advisability of minimum-wage regulation was being discussed as early as the summer of 1912; and though political animosities and the traditional conservatism of the landowners somewhat clouded the issue, there was a growing feeling that the poverty of the laborers was a national disgrace, and that minimum-wage regulation was the inevitable remedy.<sup>2</sup> A report of the Board of Trade, issued in 1910, showed that the total earnings of all classes of farm laborers in England only average 18/4 a week in 1907; that for ordinary laborers alone the corresponding figures was 17/6; and that for Oxfordshire, the county of lowest wages, the total average earnings of the ordinary laborer were 14/11.<sup>3</sup> The Land Enquiry Committee estimated that between 1907 and 1912 the cash wages of ordinary farm laborers only increased as from 102 to 104.9.<sup>4</sup> In 1913 the condition of the class was illumined by the publica-

<sup>1</sup> The report of Mr. Lloyd George's Land Enquiry Committee, which was published in 1913, stated that "the real earnings of nearly 60 per cent of the ordinary agricultural laborers have actually decreased since 1907"; see *The Land*, I (Rural), 12.

<sup>2</sup> A Unionist Minimum Wage Bill for farm laborers was introduced in the House of Commons in May, 1913; a Labor Party Bill was introduced a few weeks later. Though most of the opponents of the minimum wage were to be found in the ranks of the unionists, and its most ardent advocates were either liberals or members of the labor party, the work done by the small group of progressive unionists deserves recognition. Among them Sir Leslie Scott, the present Solicitor General, was prominent. Mr. Turnor (*op. cit.*, p. 24), speaking of agricultural wages, says: "Several years before the war this low rate of pay had begun to weigh upon the national conscience, and many farmers themselves realized that wages should be higher; there was a general consensus of opinion that 20/- a week in cash should be the minimum wage." See also Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 443.

<sup>3</sup> See Cd. 5460, pp. xvi, xvii.

<sup>4</sup> See *op. cit.*, p. 11. Judging by my own observations, I should say that in North Oxfordshire any advance in wages in that period was very unusual. About 1912-13 the ordinary laborer's weekly cash wage in that district was still 12/-; and 14/6 would be a generous estimate of the weekly average value of earnings of

tion of a volume called *How the Laborer Lives* by Mr. B. Seeborn Rowntree and Miss May Kendall. This book contained detailed studies of the weekly budgets of forty-two laboring families, mainly in Yorkshire, Essex, and Oxfordshire, and reached the conclusion that "on the average the forty-two families investigated are receiving not much more than three-fourths of the nourishment necessary for the maintenance of physical health."<sup>1</sup> Nor was an insufficient income the only trouble of the laborer. The shortage of cottages was acute, and many cottages were unsanitary and deficient in bedroom accommodation.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the farm hand had little prospect of advancement, except by emigration or by deserting agriculture for some other occupation. Farms as a rule were not large enough to allow of the creation of hierarchy of bailiffs and foremen and of an organized system of promotion. Small holdings, the creation of which had been encouraged by the Act of 1908, could do but little to improve matters, for, though the prospects of a small holding had been made somewhat better by the fall of cereal prices since 1870 (because cheap bread means an improved market for small holders' produce—fruit, vegetables, poultry, eggs, etc.), the opportunities before the small holder were, save in exceptional districts and in the case of exceptional men, strictly limited.<sup>3</sup>

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every description throughout the year—that was in fact the figure at which the total average weekly income was commonly assessed by farmers when insuring themselves against their liability under the Workmen's Compensation Acts. It must be remembered (1) that the man whose cash wages were lowest usually got least also in the way of extra earnings, and (2) that these "ordinary laborers" were a majority of the total number, at least in the low-wage counties. None the less I am inclined to think that the lot of the laborer improved during the period under discussion, probably through a diminution in drinking and in the size of families.

<sup>1</sup> See B. S. Rowntree and M. Kendall, *How the Laborer Lives*, p. 304. Of the forty-two households nineteen were in counties of super-average wages, and abnormally large families were not chosen. Similar results were reached in 1903 by Mr. H. H. Mann and in 1905-6 by Miss M. F. Davies, see *Sociological Papers*, I, 161-93, and M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village* (1909).

<sup>2</sup> See *Report of Land Enquiry Committee*, I, 83-107.

<sup>3</sup> The small holder in England usually needs subsidiary employment, e.g., in the way of hauling; but there is only a certain amount of such employment to be had, so that small holders cannot be very numerous in an ordinary village. For the small-holding movement see Hermann Levy, *Large and Small Holdings* (1911);

It seemed, too, unlikely that the laborers' lot would be appreciably improved by self-help in the way of trade unionism. The geographical dispersion of the industry, the low wages, the tendency of young men to leave agriculture for other callings, and the discouraging memory of failure in the past were all factors which hampered the growth of trade-unionist organization. Old-fashioned prejudices which regarded a trade union as a horrible and revolutionary thing still lingered among employers and landlords, and wild acts of hostility were still possible. In February, 1914, some farmers in Essex decided to dismiss and evict their men unless these ceased to be members of the union which they had recently joined. In Northamptonshire similar action was taken a little later by Lord Lilford and the tenant farmers on his estate, and it was reported in the *Times* on April 20 that "of the 70 laborers employed by Lord Lilford only half a dozen have thrown in their lot with the union in preference to retaining their positions." It is true that both in Essex and in Northamptonshire the settlement which was reached in the course of the summer was on the whole a victory for the men. It is also true that this early Victorian policy was vigorously condemned by the *Mark Lane Express*, which is the organ of the National Farmers' Union, as well as by the *Times*. The *Times* described Lord Lilford's position as "an antiquated attitude wholly out of touch with the current of thought and feeling to-day" and remarked that "the men have just as much right to belong to the Union if they choose as he has to belong to the Carlton Club." None the less the fact that laborers who joined a trade union were still liable to be treated in this fashion undoubtedly acted as a deterrent. Agricultural trade unionism was certainly making some progress in the period 1912-14. In 1912 the union which had been founded six years before in the Eastern Counties, and had been hard hit by an unsuccessful strike in 1910, was reorgan-

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A. W. Ashby, *Allotments and Small Holdings in Oxfordshire* (1917); W. H. R. Curtler, *The Enclosure and Redistribution of Our Land* (1920). For a weighty criticism see C. S. Orwin, "The Small Holdings Craze," *Edinburgh Review*, April, 1916. In addition to other factors, one must remember that the poverty of the farm laborer made it impossible, in most cases, for him to save enough capital to start a small holding with any prospect of success.

ized as the National Agricultural Laborers' and Rural Workers' Union. At the end of 1913 it counted nearly 12,000 members, and in June, 1914, the total membership was some 15,000, distributed in twenty-six counties of England and Wales. Meanwhile, in 1910, the Workers' Union renewed its previously unsuccessful activities in rural districts and made considerable progress. Between December, 1912, and March, 1914, this union increased its membership by nearly 90,000; but probably only a small fraction of these were farm laborers. Two factors were at this time contributing to bring about a general growth of trade unionism in England. In the first place, as Mr. and Mrs. Webb have pointed out, the National Insurance Act of 1911, "which practically compelled every wage-earner to join an 'approved society' of some kind, led to a dramatic expansion of Trade Union membership."<sup>1</sup> Secondly the great miners' strike of 1912 meant that all over England non-unionists who were thrown out of work by lack of coal witnessed the spectacle of their fellows who were in a union drawing out-of-work benefit which they did not receive.<sup>2</sup> Among the agricultural laborers the revival of trade unionism helped to bring about a small but helpful increase of wages in some districts. In Lancashire an overtime rate was introduced, after a strike, in 1913. In Northamptonshire wages were raised 1/- a week; sixpence an hour overtime was granted for men earning over 16/- a week; and it was arranged that work should cease on Saturdays at 4:00 P.M. This was in the summer of 1914. In Essex the dispute ended on the very eve of the war, the wage being fixed at 15/- a week, which was 1/- less than the men had demanded.<sup>3</sup> But these developments are not sufficient to disturb the general conclusion that trade unionism could not adequately ameliorate the laborers' lot. The history of agricultural trade unionism in England is a lamentable story of temporary revivals followed by rapid decline, and though the change of conditions

<sup>1</sup> See S. and B. Webb, *History of Trade Unionism* (1920), p. 498.

<sup>2</sup> This situation was noticeable among railway workers, who form a connecting link between the rural districts and urban trade unionism.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Manchester Guardian*, August 5, 1914. There was also a rise of 1/- a week in some parts of Norfolk, but this seems to have been due less to trade-unionist activity than to the example set by His Majesty the King at Sandringham.

during the war has given better ground for hope as regards the future, it would be unwarrantable to regard the movement of the years 1912-14 as the initiation of a new era. In 1874 the National Agricultural Laborers' Union, of which Joseph Arch was the leader, had 86,000 odd members, but the next year saw its membership reduced to less than 59,000, and by 1894 it had only 1,100 members. At their strongest moments the rural laborers' unions before the war contained only a small fraction of the total number of agricultural wage-earners, and the *Times* was quite justified in describing the agricultural laborers, as it did on March 6, 1914, as "an unorganized body." In 1912, Mr. George Edwards, then general secretary of the Agricultural Laborers' and Rural Workers' Union, said: "Forty years' experience has convinced me that the laborers cannot get a living wage by Trade Union effort alone. The difficulties of organization are so great that we cannot get an organization strong enough to enforce it."<sup>1</sup>

The outbreak of war in 1914 had an immediate effect upon the agricultural situation in England, but at first the effect was only slight, and the changes which took place in the first two years of the war period seem insignificant in comparison with those which occurred later. The price of wheat, which had averaged 34/- a quarter at the end of July, rose to 40/3 in the week ending August 15, and there was a corresponding advance in the prices of barley and oats. But this did not herald a continuing upward movement, and it was not until after the middle of November, 1914, that the weekly average price of wheat reached 41/-. From that time onward until the early part of the summer of 1915 the advance of prices was more marked, and in the week ending June 5 the prices of wheat, barley, and oats respectively averaged 61/9, 35/4, and 32/5 as compared with 34/-, 25/11, and 19/4 in the corresponding week of 1914. In the case of wheat and oats, however, these prices were not maintained. Wheat was selling at 43/- in the middle of September: oats averaged 26/1 in the week ending September 25. Barley, on the other hand, appreciated considerably; but though wheat and oat prices moved upward during the

<sup>1</sup> See, for the whole question of agricultural trade unionism, E. Selley, *Village Trade Unions in Two Centuries* (1919); cf. R. Lennard, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-18.

winter of 1915-16 and the weekly average for wheat was never less than 50/- between the end of October and the middle of June, wheat came down to 46/3 at the beginning of July, and after June 12, 1915, the weekly average price of wheat never reached 60/- until October 21, 1916. At the time of autumn sowing in that year, there was little to indicate to the farmer that he was on the eve of a long period of very high prices.

Table I shows the chief changes in cropping which took place in this first period of the war in England and Wales. The figures

TABLE I

Year	Arable	Grain Crops Including Beans and Peas	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Potatoes
1913.....	11,058	5,719	1,702	1,559	1,975	442
1914.....	10,998	5,759	1,807	1,505	1,930	462
1915.....	10,966	5,934	2,170	1,232	2,088	463
1916.....	11,051	5,731	1,912	1,332	2,085	428

represent thousands of acres. The poor results attained by the end of 1916 were seriously disquieting. The arable area was actually less than it had been in 1913, and though the wheat area was more extensive than in the days before the war, the figure for 1916 shows a decline of more than a quarter of a million acres from the total of 1915, and in spite of the need for bread corn, farmers were devoting increasing attention to the production of barley. The acreage under potatoes was in 1916 considerably less than before the war.<sup>1</sup> Moreover the harvest of 1916 was poor.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the year it was estimated that the amount of winter wheat sown was 15 per cent less than in the preceding year.<sup>3</sup> On the very eve of the change of government, Mr. Acland (then Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture), in

<sup>1</sup> This does not, of course, include potatoes grown in gardens and allotments.

<sup>2</sup> The yield of wheat was 28.60 bushels per acre, the average of the ten years 1907-16 being 31.40 bushels. The yield of potatoes was 5.85 tons per acre, as compared with a ten years' average of 6.16 tons.

<sup>3</sup> See *Report of the War Cabinet for 1917* (Cd. 9005), p. 156. It must be remembered that in England spring-sown wheat is always a small crop; even in 1918 it only amounted to 263,000 acres, and in 1921 had fallen to 65,000 acres.

answer to a question in the House of Commons, referred to the fact that "short harvests abroad, the development of submarine activity, and the bad weather of the last two months" had "made it clear that a very special effort must be made to maintain home food production," and on December 20 the new President of the Board, Mr. Prothero (now Lord Ernle), spoke of the country as being in the position of a "beleaguered city."<sup>1</sup> These statements are all the more significant because they were made before the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany. It was on January 31, 1917, that the German government informed the American ambassador in Berlin of its intention "to abandon the limitations which it had hitherto imposed upon itself in the employment of its fighting weapons at sea." During the month of February some 500,000 tons of British merchant shipping were sunk.

It is difficult to acquit English farmers of the charge of a certain amount of supineness during 1916. It must, however, be remembered that the course of cereal prices had not hitherto pointed to a long continuance of conditions which would make a large extension of the arable area profitable. Secondly, the supply of agricultural labor had been greatly diminished by enlistments. By the beginning of 1917 some 250,000 agricultural laborers had joined the army, and a very large number had been attracted away from farm work by the higher wages which were to be obtained in munition factories, in the building of camps and aerodromes, and in other occupations connected with the war.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Hansard's *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, Vol. 88, col. 614-615 (Dec. 4, 1916) and col. 1534.

<sup>2</sup> See *Report of the Director-General of Food Production* (1918), p. 4. Those who knew the conditions of agricultural employment had long foreseen the danger of undue depletion of the ranks of farm labor by enlistment. The unit of production being small, the farmer has not so loud a voice wherewith to attract the attention of the government as, for example, a colliery or a railway company. And a shortage of bread is only felt when it is too late to repair it. If coal runs short, soldier miners can speedily be marched back to the mines; but no man can march back from harvest to seedtime. Some blame, however, attaches to English farmers for their slowness in raising wages sufficiently to diminish the attraction of other employments. In January, 1917, the average wage of ordinary farm laborers in

It is small wonder that the year 1917 saw state control substituted for the system of *laissez faire* in the sphere of British agriculture. The Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture was set up on January 1, and this department was reorganized and the scope of its activities greatly enlarged in the following month.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, on January 10, a regulation was issued under the Defence of the Realm Act (Regulation 2 M.) which gave the Board of Agriculture power "to enter on and take possession of any land which in their opinion is not being so cultivated as to increase, as far as practicable, the food supply of the country, and after entry thereon, do all things necessary or desirable for the cultivation of the land or for adapting it to cultivation"; and also laid it down that the Board might "by notice served on the occupier of any land require him to cultivate the land in accordance with such requirements as the Board may think necessary or desirable for maintaining the food supply of the country and may prescribe in the notice." Finally the government introduced the Corn Production Bill, and this was read for the second time on April 25 and received the royal assent on August 21.

Besides giving the Board of Agriculture powers to direct farmers in the cultivation of their land—a provision which proved to have little importance because orders to plow up grass, and other directions, could be given and were given under Regulation 2 M. of the Defence of the Realm Act—the Corn Production Act did two important things, both of which seemed called for by the special circumstances of the time, but both of which had also been advocated as desirable features of a permanent agricultural

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England was 22/9; in Berkshire the winter rate in 1917 was from 15/- to 16/-; and, on April 24 in the same year, Mr. Prothero said in the House of Commons: "I know a certain farmer in a certain district who is paying his men 14/- a week and not a penny more." See *Report on Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture*, I (Cmd. 24), 105-6; Hansard, *op. cit.*, House of Commons, Vol. 92, col. 2258; cf. E. Selley, *op. cit.*, p. 144. In general, farm laborers' wages at the beginning of 1917 were only some 50 per cent higher than in 1907, while the combined price of wheat, barley, and oats was in the last week of 1916 greater by 139 per cent than it had been on the eve of the war.

<sup>1</sup> See *Report of the Director-General of Food Production* (1918), pp. 11-12.

policy. The establishment of a legal minimum wage for farm laborers had been the foundation of the Land Campaign of 1913, and in 1917 the need of attracting fresh labor to the land, and the impossibility and injustice of giving lower wages to experienced agricultural workers than to unskilled townsmen who were physically unfit for military service, made it essential that farmers should be compelled to raise wages. Guaranteed minimum prices for cereals harmonized well with the long-cherished desire of the opponents of free trade to give an artificial stimulus to arable farming, and they had been advocated, as a war measure, in the *Interim Report* of Lord Milners' committee (July, 1915)<sup>1</sup> and, as part of a post-war policy of national security, by the Agricultural Policy Sub-Committee which had been appointed by Mr. Asquith with Lord Selborne as its chairman and presented the first part of its report at the end of January, 1917.<sup>2</sup> Even for the immediate purpose of stimulating corn production during the war it was felt that the guaranty must be for several years: if farmers were to be encouraged to plow up grassland, a sudden fall of prices on the conclusion of hostilities was the thing which they would especially desire to be insured against.

It is unnecessary to recount the provisions of the Corn Production Act in detail. As regards wages, the chief points to be noticed are: (1) that minimum-wage rates were to be fixed by a central Agricultural Wages Board consisting of representatives of employers and of workmen in equal numbers, and certain members appointed by the Board of Agriculture;<sup>3</sup> (2) that district

<sup>1</sup> See Cd. 8048, p. 4. In their final report, dated October 15, 1915, the Milner committee stated that they had only been unanimous in suggesting a guaranty for wheat "on the hypothesis that there was urgent danger to our imported food supplies owing to the activity of hostile submarines" and noted that the government had decided that this danger was not sufficiently great to justify the establishment of a guaranty. See Cd. 8095, pp. 3, 11.

<sup>2</sup> See Cd. 9079 (1918). The Selborne committee also recommended the establishment of a minimum wage.

<sup>3</sup> The appointed members were not to exceed one-quarter in number of the whole Board: actually the Board consisted of thirty-nine members, of whom seven were appointed. Because of the defective organization of both farmers and laborers, however, only half the representative members were actually elected by the organizations and half were selected by the Board.

committees were established to make recommendations to the Wages Board; (3) that the minimum wage was in no case to be less than 25/- a week for an able-bodied man; (4) that the minimum-wage rates might be fixed "so as to apply universally to workmen employed in agriculture, or to any special class of workmen in agriculture, or to any special area, or to any special class in a special area, subject in each case to any exceptions which may be made by the Agricultural Wages Board for employment of any special character, and so as to vary according as the employment is for a day, week, month, or other period, or according to the number of working hours or the conditions of the employment, or so as to provide for a differential rate in the case of overtime"; and (5) that an employer who failed to pay the minimum rate was liable to a substantial fine in addition to the repayment of arrears.<sup>1</sup> The act also authorized arrangements for the payment of rates less than the minimum to persons affected by mental or physical infirmity and for the valuation of allowances in kind. Guaranteed minimum prices were established for wheat and oats. For the crop of 1917 these prices were 60/- per quarter of 480 lb. in the case of wheat and 38/6 per quarter of 312 lb. for oats. The system was to continue until 1922; but the minimum prices were to fall in 1918 and 1919 to 55/- for wheat and 32/- for oats, and in the years 1920, 1921, and 1922 to 45/- for wheat and 24/- for oats. If the average price of a quarter of wheat or oats for seven months from the beginning of September in any year was less than the guaranteed minimum price for that year, the farmer was entitled to be paid four times the amount of the difference for every acre planted with wheat and five times the difference in the case of oats for every acre planted with that grain. The payments to the farmer might, however, be reduced or withheld altogether if the land had been negligently cultivated.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to compare the system and scale of guaranteed prices established by the Corn Production Act with the proposals

<sup>1</sup> The maximum fine was £20 for each offense plus £1 a day for the continuance of the offense after conviction.

<sup>2</sup> Rents were not to be raised above the figure which might have been obtained if the guaranties had not been established.

of the Milner and Selborne committees. The former committee had recommended a guaranty for wheat only, had suggested that 45/- a quarter should be guaranteed for four years, and had urged that "if, in the opinion of the Government, it is necessary that the promise of a guaranteed minimum should be accompanied by a maximum, the latter should, in our opinion, in no case be fixed at less than 55/- per quarter."<sup>1</sup> The Selborne committee went farther. It advocated that oats should be included in the scheme, that for the first two years after the conclusion of peace the guaranties should be "at least comparable to the prices ruling during the war itself," and that a permanent guaranty should be given of 42/- a quarter for wheat and 23/- for oats. Moreover the committee urged that these prices "certainly would not afford a justification for any attempt in times of peace to fix maximum prices for wheat or oats nor for requisitions of corn grown in the United Kingdom at less than the market price."<sup>2</sup> Both committees considered that the payments should only be made in respect of corn actually harvested.<sup>3</sup>

The Corn Production Act not only put the guaranteed prices higher than those recommended by the committees, but required that they should be paid on an acreage basis, the crop being assumed to be four quarters an acre in the case of wheat and five quarters in the case of oats.<sup>4</sup> The inclusion of oats, of course, made it difficult to pay for the actual crop, because oats are

<sup>1</sup> See Cd. 8048, pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> See Cd. 9079, pp. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> See Cd. 8048, p. 4; Cd. 9079, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> The gradual expansion of the policy seems to illustrate the contention of free traders that protectionists, whether they advocate tariffs, bounties, or guaranteed prices, are always, like Oliver Twist, asking for more. In the *Majority Report of the Royal Commission of 1919* the inclusion of barley was recommended, the basic prices for the wheat and oat guaranties were considerably higher than those established for 1917 by the Corn Production Act, and the payment of these guaranties on an acreage basis was advocated as part of a permanent peace-time policy. One witness who gave evidence before the Commission urged that guaranteed prices should be established, not only for cereals, but for all agricultural products except milk; another championed a guaranty for milk; a third one for potatoes; two others, one for meat. See Cmd. 473, p. 8; Cmd. 365, qu. 5468; Cmd. 345, qu. 2358; Cmd. 391, qu. 10219; Cmd. 445, qu. 15570; Cmd. 665, qu. 17402.

largely consumed on the farm. The acreage basis too had the advantage of putting a premium upon the extension of the area under the two crops: the farmer who felt doubtful about the yield which would be obtained from grassland newly converted to arable would be encouraged by knowing that a poor crop would not diminish the sum payable under the guaranties. On the other hand the system might make farmers careless about yield and neglectful of rotations, and might conceivably incline them to plow up their worst land instead of land more suitable for cereals. It must, however, be remembered that the operation of ordinary economic motives was to some extent maintained by the fact that the crops the farmer grew remained his own to dispose of in the ordinary way, though it is also true that these motives were impeded by a system of maximum prices.

The establishment of maximum prices was connected with the upward sweep of prices which began toward the end of 1916; and in studying the history of English agriculture after the passing of the Corn Production Act it is essential to remember that, like the Corn Laws at certain periods of the Napoleonic Wars, its provisions in regard to guaranteed prices were swamped by the change in price levels. The guaranties never became operative.

At the beginning of July, 1916, English wheat was selling at 46/3—a lower figure than any which appears in the weekly averages since the third week in October, 1915, and one which was not greatly in excess of the average prices of the end of 1914. By the middle of November the price was over 70/-—a level not previously reached during the war. Moreover it continued to rise, and in the week ending April 14, 1917, averaged 85/2, having remained above 75/- ever since the end of December. On April 16 an order was issued fixing maximum prices for grain of the 1916 harvest—the prices being 78/- per 480 lb. for wheat, 65/- per 400 lb. for barley, and 55/- per 312 lb. for oats. The advance in wheat prices had been accompanied by a similar advance in the prices of the other cereals: in the week ending April 14, oats had averaged 57/2 and barley 71/10.

Henceforth maximum prices governed the markets, and their history has been summarized in the *Majority Report of the Royal*

*Commission of 1919.* "The maximum prices for the 1917 crops," say the Commissioners, "were fixed in August, 1917, in the case of wheat, rye and oats, by a scale based on date of delivery ranging from 73/6 to 77/9 per quarter of 504 lb. for wheat and rye, and 44/3 to 48/6 per quarter of 336 lb. for oats; and in the case of barley at a flat rate of 62/9 per quarter of 448 lb. For the 1918 crop, the corresponding prices were: for wheat and rye, 75/6 to 76/6; for oats, 47/6 to 52/-; and for barley, 67/- per quarter." The report adds that "the actual prices received by farmers for their crops approximated to these maximum prices."<sup>1</sup>

It is time now to return to the statistics of agricultural production. Table II shows the chief changes in cropping which

TABLE II

Year	Arable	Grain Crops Including Beans and Peas	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Potatoes
1916 . . . . .	11,051	5,731	1,912	1,332	2,085	428
1917 . . . . .	11,246	6,035	1,918	1,460	2,259	508
1918 . . . . .	12,399	7,481	2,557	1,501	2,780	634

took place in England and Wales in 1917 and 1918. The figures represent thousands of acres. These figures indicate a notable achievement. In two years the arable area was increased by 1,348,000 acres. That the wheat acreage increased so little between 1916 and 1917 is not surprising, for in England wheat is almost entirely autumn sown and the autumn seedtime was past before the factors making for increased production became operative. No doubt mistakes were sometimes, perhaps frequently, made in the process of breaking up pasture, and some land was plowed which it would have been better to retain as grass. But

<sup>1</sup> See Cmd. 473, § 15, p. 5. For certain agricultural products other than cereals maximum prices had been fixed somewhat earlier, e.g., hay and straw (June, 1916), milk (November, 1916), seed potatoes (January, 1917), ware potatoes, (February, 1917). See Report of the Committee appointed by the Agricultural Wages Board to inquire into the Financial Results of the Occupation of Agricultural Land and the Cost of Living of Rural Workers, Cmd. 76 (1919), pp. 4-8; cf. Benjamin H. Hibbard, *Effects of the Great War upon Agriculture in the United States and Great Britain* (1919), pp. 204-19.

estimates made in regard to a sample of about 78,000 acres distributed among more than 600 parishes suggest that on the whole the results justified the conversion. Table III, taken from the

TABLE III

	Estimated Yield on New Arable, 1918	Average Yield, England and Wales, 1918	Average of the Ten Years 1909-18
	Bushels	Bushels	Bushels
Wheat.....	31.3	32.9	31.1
Oats.....	40.7	41.3	39.4
Barley.....	28.8	32.4	31.9
Beans.....	27.5	29.4	27.6
Peas.....	26.9	27.5	24.8
	Tons	Tons	Tons
Potatoes.....	7.1	6.6	6.3

Agricultural Statistics of the Ministry of Agriculture for the year 1919, sets forth the evidence of this sample, which, it is stated, included "cases of total or partial failure" and was based on "estimates made by qualified persons."<sup>1</sup>

Of the newly plowed land, probably about 70 per cent was sown with oats and 15 per cent with wheat.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, another side to the picture—the statistics of live stock. The most important figures are given in Table IV (thousands omitted). It will be noticed that, with the exception

TABLE IV

Year	Cows in Milk	Total Cattle	Sheep	Pigs
1913.....	1,707	5,717	17,130	2,102
1914.....	1,908	5,878	17,260	2,481
1915.....	1,882	6,064	17,523	2,420
1916.....	1,856	6,216	17,951	2,168
1917.....	1,831	6,227	17,170	1,919
1918.....	1,858	6,200	16,475	1,697

of cows in milk, the totals of all these classes of stock were lower in 1918 than in 1916, and that the cows in milk were fewer than they had been in 1914. Moreover the amount of food for live stock which was produced in 1918 is estimated to have been

<sup>1</sup> See Cmd. 680, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

less than that produced in 1916 by more than two million tons.<sup>1</sup> Part of this last decline was, however, due to the accidents of the seasons, for the hay crop of 1916 was unusually good, while that in 1918 was deficient. And Lord Ernle has calculated that if these losses in fodder are converted into their equivalent in meat and are set against the gains in other directions, a comparison of the two years leaves us with a net gain of 3,294,000 tons of human food.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, a sense in which the food-production campaign may be said to have disappointed its promoters. The original scheme which was submitted to the Cabinet in April, 1917, was for an addition of three million acres to the arable area of 1916, before the harvest of 1918. But the Cabinet did not consider the scheme until late in June. As Lord Ernle says, "precious months were lost," and partly because of this, partly because an increase of production was expected in Ireland and Scotland, the program was modified.<sup>3</sup> The revised program "provided for an increase in the tillage area of England and Wales of 2,600,000 acres, as compared with 1916, and it was estimated that 2,050,000 acres of permanent grass would have to be ploughed in order to obtain this result."<sup>4</sup> Even this modified scheme was not carried out. The total increase in the arable area was, as we have seen, less than 1,400,000 acres, and the total increase in the area under crops other than grass is put by Lord Ernle at "upwards of 1,950,000 acres."<sup>5</sup> Lord Ernle describes the chief factors which hampered progress in the following passage:

One obstacle to the progress of the campaign was the difficulty of convincing farmers of the reality of the danger. Each delay, disappointment, failure, or modification of plans, however inevitable it might be, each acre

<sup>1</sup> See Lord Ernle's article, "The Food Campaign of 1916-18," *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, LXXXII (1921), 35.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> See *Report of the Director-General of Food Production* (1918), p. 6. *The Report of the War Cabinet for 1917*, however, describes the 1918 program as providing for "an increase in the arable area over 1916 of 2,700,000 acres in England and Wales." See Cd. 9005, pp. 158-59.

<sup>5</sup> See Lord Ernle, *Food Campaign of 1916-1918*, p. 32.

of land appropriated for aerodromes, was used as a proof that the position was safe. It not only encouraged farmers to hang back, but chilled the enthusiasm of the Executive Committees. From this point of view, the withdrawal of the 18,000 skilled ploughmen on May 10, 1917, the loss of the summer months, the delay in the sanction of the programme were serious and widespread in their combined effects. Still more paralysing was the comparative failure to supply the promised soldier labour. . . . Almost equally great was the disappointment over the supply of tractors.<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1918 a new program was prepared for the forthcoming season. A million more acres of grass were to be plowed up. But this scheme was never submitted to the Cabinet. The German offensive, leading to further military demands upon the man power of the country and the withdrawal of large numbers of agricultural workers for military service, combined with other reasons to convince the Board of Agriculture that the proposed increase of tillage could not be carried out. In July, 1918, the program was abandoned, and Lord Lee, the Director of Food Production, resigned. Lord Ernle remarks that "two circumstances, the first of which was accidental—the foul weather of September and October, and the signature of the Armistice in November—subsequently justified the Board's decision." But he adds that "there were obvious risks in the abandonment of the programme as well as in its prosecution."<sup>2</sup>

It is scarcely possible to describe in a few words the main effects of all these agricultural changes upon the various classes of the rural population. There can be no doubt that the land-owners suffered loss. A strong committee which was appointed by the Agricultural Wages Board in March, 1918, to inquire into the financial results of the occupation of agricultural land and the cost of living of rural workers, reported a year later that so far as evidence was available it tended to show: (1) that in the majority of cases changes of rental had only taken place on a change of tenancy; (2) that something like 25 per cent might be taken as the proportion of land subjected to rent adjustment since Lady Day, 1914; and (3) that in many cases, even where the rents had been raised, they had not reached the full competitive

<sup>1</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 43-47.

value of the land.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the upward rush of prices had enormously increased the cost of repairs, and though the full influence of this factor was not felt until after the conclusion of hostilities because shortage of labor and materials compelled the postponement of repairs which would normally have been undertaken, note was already taken in the above-mentioned report of the large quantity of land which was being sold.<sup>2</sup>

If landowners suffered, farmers undoubtedly prospered during the war. They had many difficulties to contend with, but their incomes increased. Though the régime of maximum prices, at least in the case of cereals and milk, prevented them from taking full advantage of the war-time market in the later stages of the struggle, and though the costs of production rose, prices were on the whole very remunerative. The fixed prices did not always operate to reduce profits. For example, the Secretary of the Ministry of Food (Sir William Beveridge) told the Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1919 that, in the case of potatoes, the farmer, at least in the year 1917, had "got money from the State which unquestionably he would not have got in the open market."<sup>3</sup> It must be remembered, too, that the farmer was exempt from the excess-profits duty. The fact that few English farmers keep adequate accounts and the spirit of secretiveness which is not uncommon among them makes it impossible to obtain comprehensive statistical evidence as to the degree to which their profits increased. But such facts as are available point to a very substantial improvement. The National Farmers' Union of England submitted to the Royal Commission some figures relating to a group of 78 farms with a total area of 33,531 acres.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Cmd. 76, pp. 9-11. The diminishing proportion of the net returns received by the landlord of a farm in one of the Eastern Counties is shown by a graph in an article on "Farming Equipment and Finance" by C. S. Orwin and S. J. Upfold which is published in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, LXXXII, 155.

<sup>2</sup> See Cmd. 76, p. 11. The accumulation of arrears of repairs was particularly disastrous for the landowners because building costs advanced rapidly after the armistice.

<sup>3</sup> See *Minutes of Evidence*, I (Cmd. 345), p. 103, question 2517.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, V (Cmd. 665), Appendices, p. 3.

The farms were divided into six classes according to size, and in the four classes which in 1913-14 showed an excess of receipts per acre over payments per acre, the balance per acre in the period 1917-19 showed an increase of 277 per cent, 229 per cent, 673 per cent, and 39 per cent respectively. In the two classes of farms which had adverse balances in 1913-14 deficits of 8/3 and 4/5 an acre were in 1917-19 converted into credit balances of 34/- and 12/-. Further light on the question is supplied by the *Report of the Committee of the Agricultural Wages Board* which has previously been quoted. The Committee remark that the material for a comparison between the pre-war position of farmers and their position during the war is scanty, but say "it all tends to the same conclusion, viz., that farming has been substantially more remunerative during the war than in the period immediately preceding it," while "it would appear that the year 1916-1917—i.e., the twelve months ending Lady Day, 1917—was that in which profits were largest." The Committee came to the conclusion that "the farmers' average pre-war net returns from farming were in the region of 9/- to 10/- per acre, and that in 1918 these had risen to about 34/- per acre," but they observed that the position had subsequently been changed "by the operation of the Agricultural Wages Board's awards, the full effect of which was not felt in the year 1917-1918."<sup>1</sup>

To the agricultural laborer the war brought an increase in wages and a reduction of hours, but it is arguable that an agricultural minimum wage might have been established if there had been no war, and that, though circumstances connected with the war emergency ultimately led to its establishment in 1917, the outbreak of hostilities actually postponed legislation. In the first years of the war wages rose sporadically and slowly; but a minimum wage of 25/- a week was made obligatory from the date on which the Corn Production Act came into force (August 21,

<sup>1</sup> See Cmd. 76, pp. 38, 40. For other evidence see the *Minority Interim Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture* (Cmd. 473), p. 9, § 4, and the sections of the *Minutes of Evidence* there referred to. The contrast between the war period and the years immediately preceding the war shows itself in the statistics of farming bankruptcies. The total numbers of farming failures under the Bankruptcy and Deeds of Arrangement Acts were 245 in 1910, 305 in 1911, 336 in 1912, 326 in 1913, 189 in 1914, 132 in 1915, 78 in 1916, 65 in 1917, 30 in 1918.

1917), and the Agricultural Wages Board set up by that act had power to fix rates higher than the statutory minimum and was charged with the duty of fixing such minimum rates as would "secure for able-bodied men wages which, in the opinion of the Board, are adequate to promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family in accordance with such standard of comfort as may be reasonable in relation to the nature of his occupation."<sup>1</sup> The first award made by the Wages Board—one for the county of Norfolk—came into operation on May 20, 1918. By the end of the year no English or Welsh county had a minimum rate of less than 30/- for an able-bodied male over twenty-one years of age, while in Cheshire, Durham, and Northumberland the minimum rate was 36/-, and, in Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire, 36/6. It was not, however, the high-wage counties which received the largest increases; and the committee appointed by the Wages Board reported in March, 1919, that a general result of the minimum wage had been "substantially to narrow the gap between the highest and lowest paid counties."<sup>2</sup> Including the value of allowances this committee estimated the average minimum rates of 1918 as 31/5 for ordinary laborers, and 38/1 for stockmen, or 33/- for all classes. These figures, as compared with the wages of 1914, were reckoned to represent a rise of 83 per cent for ordinary laborers, 103 per cent for stockmen, and 88 per cent for all classes. In the same period the expenditure of a farm worker's family on food, rent, fuel and light, clothes, insurances, and cleaning materials taken together was estimated to have increased 85 per cent.<sup>3</sup> "As a general statement," the committee observes, "it would be true to say that the minimum rates in 1918

<sup>1</sup> See 7 and 8 Geo. 5, chap. 46, § 5 (6).

<sup>2</sup> See Cmd. 76, p. 21. The desirability of such a leveling up of agricultural wages in the counties of low wages was urged by the present writer in 1914. See R. Lennard, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> See Cmd. 76, pp. 24, 37. As regards the distribution of the net returns of farming, the article of C. S. Orwin and S. J. Upfold already cited contains the following statement with regard to the farm the accounts of which were analyzed: "The landlord's share declined steadily throughout the period, no increase in rent having occurred, and speaking broadly it may be stated that the farmer took his original share *plus* that which would have gone to the landlord on the previous basis of distribution, whilst labor continued to take the same proportionate amount as at the outset."—C. S. Orwin and S. J. Upfold, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

represent fewer hours of work than the wages quoted for 1914." No doubt the establishment of overtime rates tended to lessen the amount of overtime that was worked by making it costly to the employer. The establishment of extra rates for overtime also provided an instrument which at the end of the war was used as a means of securing a weekly half-holiday (apart from Sunday) for the agricultural worker.<sup>1</sup> But the effects of the minimum wage extended beyond these more or less direct results of its enactment. Agricultural trade unionism was stimulated. As Mr. George Dallas, of the Workers' Union, said: "The need for representation on the bodies for fixing wages made organization essential."<sup>2</sup> The insufficiency of the figure actually named in the Corn Production Act to serve as an adequate minimum rate when the cost of living continued to rise increased this stimulus, for, as Mr. E. Selley says, "there is no doubt that the insertion in the Act of a paltry 25/- minimum drove thousands into Unions who

<sup>1</sup> I venture to quote some arguments in favor of this from the *Minority Report* which I addressed to the Minister of Reconstruction in November, 1918, as a member of the committee appointed by him to consider the employment of returned sailors and soldiers on the land. I had previously approached several members of the Wages Board in much the same sense: "A rigid law that there shall be a Saturday half-holiday is unthinkable in agriculture. Cows must be milked, horses must be fed, and in hay time and harvest a fine afternoon cannot be missed. A rule that some day in the week must be allotted each laborer for a half-holiday, while less objectionable from the farmer's point of view, would not meet the needs of the laborers. Either the men would keep holiday each on a different day, so that they could not combine for games, or there would be a tendency for the farmer to give all his men holiday on a day which was too wet for outdoor recreation. For cricket and football to prosper it is obviously necessary that the same day should be chosen for holiday making throughout the village, and in all the villages of the neighborhood, and that it should be known some time beforehand what that day will be. Only so can inter-village matches be arranged. Now all this can be obtained without undue disturbance of farming operations by a simple wage regulation. If the Wages Board requires overtime rates—say, time and a half rates—to be paid for all work done in excess of five hours on Saturday or on some other stated day of the week, the result will be that only really urgent work will be done on the afternoon of that day, and the men who can be spared will be spared, while at the same time the law will have all the elasticity which agriculture requires because of its dependence on wind and weather."—*Report of the Committee of Section IV of the Advisory Council* (1919), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> See E. Selley, *op. cit.*, p. 161. Mr. Selley also quotes the opinion of Mr. R. B. Walker, the general secretary of the National Agricultural Laborers, and Rural Workers' Union, to the effect that the Corn Production Act had "undoubtedly provided an incentive to the laborer to organize."

might not have joined had a really adequate minimum been provided." In July, 1919, Mr. Selley estimated that nearly 250,000 farm workers were subscribing to one or other of the several unions for which they are eligible.<sup>1</sup> Probably the minimum wage and other influences springing from the arrangements and legislation of the war period were the chief causes of the growth of organization which showed itself among the farmers at this time. The agricultural employers as well as their employees extended their organization.<sup>2</sup> And the Wages Board brought the representatives of both sides together, with a notable effect in increased mutual knowledge and respect. This wholesome development was assisted in no small degree by the formation in March, 1918, of the Agricultural Club, under the genial presidency of Sir Henry Rew. The object of the club was "the discussion of subjects relating to agricultural and rural development." Members of the Wages Board and officers of the Board's staff, and subsequently members of the various District Wages committees, were eligible for membership of the club without election, and in addition other persons might be elected by ballot, though the total number of persons so elected was not to exceed twenty. The club usually met on the evenings before the meetings of the Wages Board, and its distinctive characteristic, as Sir Henry Rew remarks, "was that farmers and agricultural laborers were placed on an absolute equality."<sup>3</sup> The happy results have been described by Lord Bledisloe. He writes:

On many a chilly winter's evening, illuminated and warmed by two great fire-places and the often unvarnished rhetoric and scathing sallies of bucolic orators of very varying political views and social experience, the owner of many broad acres, the tenant farmer of wide agricultural experience and renown, and the industrious and independent farm worker, living in and loving (as only an English agricultural worker can) his humble, creeper-clad cottage home, could have been seen filling their pipes from the same tobacco-pouch and enjoying each other's company in an unaffectedly congenial atmosphere.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See E. Selley, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-64.

<sup>2</sup> The declared membership of the National Farmers' Union increased from 22,674 in 1916 to 27,001 in 1917, 51,368 in 1918 and 72,036 in 1919.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Henry Rew, *The Story of the Agricultural Club, 1918-1921* (1922), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, Foreword by Lord Bledisloe, p. xiii.

It would be fitting to conclude a sketch of English agricultural history during the war with a general judgment upon the system of state control which was set up under the pressure of war-time necessities. One would like to estimate its efficiency for the immediate purposes of war and discover any lessons of permanent value which the experience of the period might suggest. But the history is baffling to a degree. In the whirlwind of violent and conflicting forces, with naval, military, political, and financial factors all changing from day to day and each influencing the agricultural situation, it is difficult to trace even the more important causes of the most striking changes. What shall we say was the real cause of the great extension of the arable area which took place in 1917 and 1918? Given the system of maximum prices and the insistent demand of the War Office for men, there can be little doubt that vigorous action on the part of the state was necessary for the development of food production. The Board of Agriculture and the Food Production Department had to protect agriculture against other departments of state. But if it had been politically possible or socially desirable to leave the farmer to get the best price he could, and if a sufficient supply of labor had been left on the land, would the ordinary economic motives have induced an extension of corn-growing similar to that which was actually brought about by state interference? May we conclude that the history of 1915 and 1916 reveals so much inertia in the farming community that nothing short of state control could be expected to produce the necessary activity? Is this conclusion seriously shaken by the fact that the rise in cereal prices did not become revolutionary in character until the autumn of 1916? Even more hesitating must be our answer to questions regarding the relative importance and efficiency of the various instruments employed by the state in the food-production campaign. Did the guaranteed prices of the Corn Production Act affect the course of events to an appreciable extent? The guaranties never became operative; but it might be argued that they gave the farmer some security against the possibility of a sudden fall in prices.<sup>1</sup> Was

<sup>1</sup> When Sir Daniel Hale of the Board of Agriculture was giving evidence before the Royal Commission of 1919 he was asked, "Do you think that the

the really effective force the power to issue plowing orders which was derived from the Defence of the Realm Act? How much would have been accomplished if the action of the state had been limited to negotiation with the War Office for the supply of soldier labor and of the labor of prisoners, and to measures for the provision of tractors and fertilizers? Finally, what must we say of the general lessons to be derived from the history of the war in regard to the desirability of state interference with the conduct of the agricultural industry? On the one hand, it must be remembered that during the war everything had to be done in a hurry, and that newly enrolled officials had to undertake work which was almost entirely strange to them and in regard to which little experience was available. A permanent peace-time policy would be enforced by trained officials, and its administration would grow richer in experience from year to year. On the other hand, it is equally true that patriotism and a spirit of willing helpfulness pervaded all classes in the period of national emergency: in such a time of crisis people were willing to put up with restraints and inconveniences which normally they would not endure for a moment. When the country is no longer "a beleaguered city," the average Englishman begins once more to think that his home is his castle. On one minor point, perhaps, a definite conclusion may be reached. Maximum prices which are lower than market prices must tend to impair the *quality* of agricultural products. The farmer will be able to obtain the maximum price for goods of inferior quality, and he can get no more in any case. He will therefore become indifferent to quality.

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guaranteed prices as a policy have really stimulated corn production in this country?" He replied: "Certainly not. I should say not, because they have never been in operation. You see the actual prices that have prevailed since the Corn Production Act was passed have been a long way above the guarantees of the Corn Production Act, and a long way below the world's market prices. The world prices, for instance, in 1918 for wheat would be over 100/- instead of the 75/- that we have been tied to." See Cmd. 345, p. 11, qu. 220.